



You are mine and all I have is yours

Our Father, who art in Heaven...

We pray it every Sunday – you might pray it daily.

I wonder what you think or see or feel as you address God with those words, “our Father”.

Good? Bad? Indifferent?

What does it make you think about the nature of God?

I often wonder what JC thought when he called God “father”. Regardless of the personality of any father there’s also the cultural norm. The image of a modern Dad is a million miles away from the upper class Edwardian Dads we saw in Downton Abbey,

and I have struggled to find *anything* very authoritative about fatherhood in the Holy Land in 1st century.

This parable that Mike read for us perhaps explains something of what Jesus thought when he referred to God as Father. It appears in the gospel as the 3rd in a group of stories about lost things and the reaction of those who find them:

- A shepherd finds a lost sheep
 - A woman finds a lost coin
- Both gather their friends and neighbours and command them to “rejoice with me”
Both stories end with Jesus insisting that Heaven rejoices over a repentant sinner.
- Then there’s a man who finds his long lost son and throws a party.
and conveniently for us today the person organising the rejoicing is a father.

To start with we are introduced to the family dynamic through money and inheritance, and that was one very important part of Fatherhood. It was to have heirs to carry on the family name and to take over the family business.

That’s partly why the request was so shocking.

As the younger brother he would have inherited a smaller portion, but I think we see from the older brother’s reaction when his sibling returns, that the expectation was not that younger sons got all the spare cash to have fun with

whilst the elder one had the land and was stuck having to work to make it pay.

So Master Younger is saying firstly,

“Can’t wait for you to die Dad, it can’t come soon enough for my plans”,

and secondly,

“I’m taking my share of the family wealth and instead of using it to increase our wealth and status, I’m going to spend, spend, spend!”

And his Dad did what was asked!

Whilst his father gave up his reputation as a good head of family the son headed off to what is so meaningfully called “a far country”.

Eventually after good times and bad, he decides his only option is to return home.

We will never know whether his carefully prepared speech was humble, heartfelt and honest or a hypocritical load of tosh - because it is never needed.

Even when he is – another meaningful phrase - “still a long way off” his father sees him

Has he been looking out for him day after day, month after month, perhaps year after year ?

Who knows? But his father once again throws reputation to the wind,

hitches up his robes, runs to greet him,
dresses him in finery and throws a party.

It's all uncomfortable reading for all of us who are adamant that only when you've prostrated yourself in front of God and asked for forgiveness will you be shortlisted for consideration.

The father Jesus offers us is one of grace abounding.

The final scene in this story is the conversation between father and elder son.

The son complains that though he has slaved all these years no party has ever been thrown for him. But,

“when this son of yours who has squandered your property in immoral living comes home you kill the fatted calf!”

This son of yours who has squandered your property in immoral living.

And the father argues with not a word.

He reassures his elder son of his love for him too “everything I have is yours”

but he doesn't reject the description of his second son nor the title “this son of yours”.

Hold on to that - the hardworking biddable boy and the wayward impulsive and frankly selfish one – both his sons.

Amazing love how can it be.?

Now let me give a word of testimony concerning Isaiah 43.

I first came across it in my early 30s when I heard a Methodist minister preaching on it.

It stayed with me and followed me around throughout the time I was candidating and training for ministry.

It has continued to do so in some of the hardest times of my life.

And it came to me the week I was mulling over this sermon .

“ I have called you by name, you are mine”.

It was after I had been reading about the ancient Greek and Roman traditions of adoption.

The expectation of surviving to adulthood is a given these days. The loss of a child shocks and hurts us to the core.

But in the time of Jesus it could be quite normal to find yourself childless and we know that adoption was common in these great civilisations.

Not because “we want a baby”, there may have *been* children,

But as an heir.

Grandfathers were known to adopt children of their daughters to keep unbroken the male line, or nephews ... sometimes family slaves.

“I have called you by name you are mine”

“Everything I have is yours” .

Now when I first heard this passage expounded I was struck by the realism that went with this calling. It offers some of the most common words in the bible, “fear not” and also redemption,

What a message for Father’s day – a father of amazing grace who calls us all by name and redeems us.

But actually it doesn’t stop there.

It references OT images

and promises that when you walk through the waters they will not overwhelm you
and when you walk through the fire you will not be set ablaze.

30 years ago I heard the Rev Paul Smith keeping us in the real world when he said

“God doesn’t promise that you won’t ever get your feet wet
nor get your fingers scorched,

just that God will be with us in it and not let us be consumed.”

This is the Father Jesus asks us to pray to, one who will always forgive and redeem and be with us,
but who calls us by name, and sets us to work.

We’ve passed through some interesting times recently - fire flood and pestilence all made headlines – and
we anticipate the future with some uncertainty.

There are plenty for who it will be hard, and I wonder what your church is planning to do about it in the
“new normal”?

We are heirs of our heavenly father and his family business ... in a world of sickness, poverty and injustice
there is work to do.